

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name

BETH ELON

other names / site number

VA DHR file no. 043-5117**2. Location**

street & number

4600 Nine Mile Road (far north end of Watson Lane)

city or town

Richmondstate **Virginia**

Code

VAcounty **Henrico**

code

087zip code **23223****3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official / Title

Date

State of Federal Agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official / Title

Date

State of Federal Agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register☐ See continuation sheet.☐ determined eligible for the National Register☐ See continuation sheet☐ determined not eligible for the National Register☐ See continuation sheet☐ removed from the National Register☐ other. (explain: _____)

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/ single dwelling

AGRICULTURAL/SUBSISTENCE /agricultural field

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/ single dwelling

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian / Queen Anne

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls concrete shingles over weatherboard

roof tin

other wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more of the boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- ☒ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

PERFORMING ARTS

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1890 - 1933

Significant Dates

1890

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

LESLIE F. WATSON & LAURA WOODRUFF WATSON

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect / Builder

rough plan drawing by Leslie Watson, carpenter: F.C. Swann;

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing
(36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository:

Beth Elon

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property **3.196**

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	290250	4157774	3			
2				4			

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name / title **Richard C. and Jeanne E. McNeil**

organization date **September 1, 2002**

street & number **4600 Nine Mile Road** telephone **804/ 226-1382 or 804/ 827-0333**

city or town **Richmond** state **Virginia** zip code **23223**

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name **Richard C. and Jeanne E. McNeil**

street & number **4600 Nine Mile Road** telephone **804/226-1382 or 804/ 827-0333**

city or town **Richmond** state **Virginia** zip code **23223**

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Beth Elon
Henrico County, VA

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NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Summary

Beth Elon is a two-story frame dwelling with a hipped roof in a simple Queen Anne style located approximately two-tenths of a mile from Nine Mile Road at the north end of a tree-lined gravel road, Watson Lane, in Henrico County, Virginia. The house is set on a gently sloping front lawn with large trees and shrubbery. The house shows the inspiration of pattern book designs, particularly in the roof's saw-toothed ridgeline. Beth Elon was built ca. 1890 for Leslie Fletcher Watson and his wife, Laura Woodruff Watson, who were active in the composition, performance and teaching of music in the Richmond area between 1884 and 1933. Original rough-drawn pencil sketches for the design of the house, rendered by Leslie Watson, are in possession of the current owners, along with many papers, letters, photographs, glass negatives, and other items historically connected with the house and the Watsons. The property also contains a contributing site, the ruins of "Forest," an earlier house in which the Watsons lived while Beth Elon was under construction, as well as a contributing frame outhouse. Noncontributing buildings on the property include a small frame structure, formerly used as a shelter at a streetcar stop, a cinder block storage building, and a modern frame barn.

Inventory

1. Beth Elon (ca. 1890). Contributing building.
2. Ruins of "Forest". Home that Leslie and Laura Watson lived in while Beth Elon was being built. Date of construction not known. Formerly two story frame structure with tin roof. Contributing site.
3. Small frame outhouse. Moved slightly from original site. Contributing building.
4. Small frame structure. Former streetcar stop shelter moved to property when the streetcar line was discontinued. Date not known. **Noncontributing** building.
5. One story, three-room, cinder block building. One room used for coal storage, one as a storeroom, and one as a laundry room. Constructed prior to 1957, but exact date not known. **Non-contributing** building.
6. Frame storage barn. Constructed in 2001. **Noncontributing** building.

Detailed Description

Exterior

Beth Elon preserves the appearance and feeling of the substantial, two-story Queen Anne-derived farmhouses that once clustered along the northern margins of Richmond, within walking distance of the last stops of the city's extensive and pioneering electric streetcar system. While changes have been made to the exterior coverings of Beth Elon, the house retains integrity of materials, and the owners intend to remove the mid-twentieth century coverings to reveal the original cladding materials that survive in good condition beneath. While houses such as Beth Elon once prominently populated the margins between city and country in Richmond, twentieth-century development, and particularly aggressive commercial development on the adjacent Mechanicsville Turnpike and Nine Mile Roads, have all but obliterated this chapter of Richmond's history. Beth Elon is a rare survival of the type of house once important on the Richmond landscape.

Beth Elon was originally sheathed in weatherboards and featured a roof of cedar shingles. Its original weatherboards were covered with concrete shingles and the cedar shingles were covered with standing seam metal sometime between 1949 and 1957. The foundation, two chimneys, and porch piers are brick. Several minor changes were made to the porch configuration of the house, as is typical of the sort of incremental alterations made to Queen Anne farmhouses in the area. The family possesses an extensive collection of photographs made by Leslie Watson of his house, which provide unusually extensive documentation of the early conditions of the house, and allow for an unusually accurate accounting of the minor

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alterations made to the porch configuration. There is a small shed-roofed porch on the northeast side (rear) of the house, which was enclosed in the early 1960s. The front porch, on the southwest face of the house, was originally on center with sets of steps on either side. A shed roof was added to the northwest side of the porch and the steps on that side were removed, possibly in the early 1900s. The shed-roofed addition was enclosed in glass at one time early on and used by Leslie Watson as a quiet place to compose his music. Later the glass enclosure was removed and the shed-roofed addition was retained as an extension of the original porch. The shed roof, the porch floor, and porch railing were rebuilt in 2000, with original columns and original wood trim preserved. The house retains all of its original window sash and sills, constructed by Pike Watson, father of Leslie Watson. At its east and west peaks and visible from the north and south elevations, the roof features saw-toothed east/west cresting (the "dragon's teeth" evident on the roof in early photographs). This cresting was duplicated in 2000 in standing seam metal roofing material.

Plan

Beth Elon's approximately 2,432 square feet of livable space is in a roughly square configuration, organized around a truncated center hall. Four major rooms are distributed on a similar plan on two floors, connected by front and back stairs. The front stair retains its original decorative railing. The first floor is comprised of a living room and bedroom astride the center hall at the south (front) of the house, and a dining room and kitchen astride the back stair at the north (rear) of the house. The dining room and kitchen are connected both by a door and through an opening (a "pass through") between them, which terminates in a substantial cabinet in the dining room. A bathroom occupies the space between the bedroom and the kitchen. The second floor is composed of four bedrooms roughly corresponding to the position of the four rooms below. All of the rooms retain substantial original woodwork, with the dining room retaining handsome oak wainscoting. One peculiarity retained in the first-floor plan is a deflection in the living room wall, designed to accommodate the bulk of the Watsons' Steinway grant piano, received as a wedding gift. A porch reaches across the first-floor south façade (front) of the house, with a smaller second-floor porch resting above it. Another, smaller enclosed porch is located on the northeast corner of the first floor. Accessed by the kitchen door, this porch was enclosed about 1960.

Interior

The original interior detailing of the house has been retained, except for the downstairs kitchen and bathroom. The woodwork is unpainted cypress, sealed with the original varnish. All six original wood fireplace mantels remain, including the mantel in the downstairs bedroom with inlaid images of birds cut by hand with a jigsaw by the Watsons' son, Arthur, at age seven. The dining room includes a built-in wood cabinet with three drawers below, a china cabinet above, and an enclosed section in the center that opens into a cabinet in the kitchen behind the dining room. This cabinet was referred to by family members as "the slide" and was originally used to serve food and remove dishes between the dining room and the kitchen. The dining room ceiling features a pattern of rectangles formed by finished six-inch, round-edged, cypress moldings. Floors throughout the house are original heart pine, except for the oak parquet floor in the dining room, and the maple floor in the kitchen. It appears that the oak floor was laid on top of what may have been original heart pine flooring. Linoleum was removed from the kitchen floor in 1997 to reveal the original maple flooring.

Landscape Features

The landscape includes large oak, cedar, holly, and magnolia trees, along with concord grape vines and pear trees. Crepe myrtle bushes, pomegranate bushes, and other original flora also remain. Laura Watson in letters to her sister, Laura Joy, refers repeatedly to her lovely yard and provides a detailed description (with some variety names) of the fruits, vegetables, flowers and trees that she and Leslie Watson cultivated. Watson Lane serves as the driveway for Beth Elon.

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Integrity Statement

While the 3.196 acres surrounding Beth Elon is a small portion of the original approximately 26-acre home site established by Leslie and Laura Watson in 1884, the setting of the house with its surrounding trees and landscaping similar to its appearance in their early years in Virginia.

While some minor alterations have been made to the house, Beth Elon retains significant integrity of materials, and clearly projects the feel of a house type once common in metropolitan Richmond. Now, as a result of rampant development on the suburban margins of the city, structures such as this are rare.

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NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary Statement of Significance

Beth Elon was built ca. 1890 by Leslie Fletcher Watson and his wife, Laura Woodruff Watson, in Henrico County, Virginia. The house is in a simple Queen Anne style and was planned and executed with the involvement of Leslie Watson and his father. Beth Elon is a two-and-a-half story frame house with a standing seam metal hipped roof. The roof features a replicated "saw-tooth" cresting design; this original roof feature was inspired by designs in architectural pattern books. Its setting features large trees on a gently sloping lot and maintains much of its historic integrity. The Watsons were well known musicians, composers and music teachers in the Richmond area between 1884 and 1933 and were early associates in the American Guild of Organists. Laura Watson was one of the first women certified by the AGO. Leslie Watson composed at least 22 pieces of music for the organ that were published by Lorenz of Dayton, Ohio in *The Organist*, a popular publication that was used in churches all over America. Both Leslie and Laura Watson had lengthy careers as organists with churches in Richmond and also gave private music lessons for many years. Leslie Watson was active in the development of music courses in Richmond's public school system and taught music at John Marshall High School.

Justification of Criteria

Beth Elon is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of performing arts as a place where locally and nationally distributed music was composed and where music was taught and performed by Leslie and Laura Watson.

In the area of performing arts, both Leslie and Laura Watson are significant for their contributions to music performance, composition and teaching in the Richmond area between 1884 and 1933. As the place most closely related to their musical careers, Beth Elon is eligible under Criterion B.

As a good example of Queen Anne architecture and one of few buildings in this style remaining in the area, Beth Elon is eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture.

Historical Background

Family lore recalls that the land and the funds to build Beth Elon were a parental wedding gift to Leslie and Laura Watson. Leslie was from Sycamore, Illinois and Laura was from New York City. They met while attending music school in the early 1880s and were married in Cambridge, Massachusetts on October 25, 1883. They decided to settle in Virginia because they felt that the climate would be better for Leslie's health. On June 4, 1884 Leslie Watson purchased the land on New Bridge (Nine Mile) Road, three miles from Richmond, upon which Beth Elon was constructed. On the same date, Watson's father, Pike Watson, purchased 105 acres on Williamsburg Road nearby. The Watsons lived on this property in a house called "Forest" while Beth Elon was under construction. The ruins of "Forest" remain on the property.

Leslie and Laura Watson were both certified as associates by the American Guild of Organists (AGO) early in the history of that organization. The AGO was established in 1896, and the Virginia Chapter of the AGO was chartered in 1910. Leslie Watson successfully sat for the exam in New York on September 25, 1911. Laura Watson successfully sat for the exam on September 27, 1915 and was among the first women certified by the AGO. Certification as an Associate by the AGO was and still is considered to be the equivalent of a Master's Degree. Both of their original framed certificates hang in the front hall at Beth Elon. Leslie Watson, referred to as "Professor Watson" by his peers and students, served as the second Dean of the Virginia Chapter of AGO, with his tenure ending in 1916.

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Leslie and Laura Watson were a vital part of the church music scene in Richmond from their arrival in 1884 until the time of their deaths in 1933. Professor Watson was organist at Leigh Street, Grace, First, and Second Baptist churches, and at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church as well as Union Station and Broad Street Methodist churches. He composed at least 22 pieces of music for organ, many of which were published in Lorenz's *The Organist*. Music published by Lorenz of Dayton, Ohio, was extremely popular and was played in churches all over America. He also composed songs and some orchestral pieces, including 'Reverie' and 'Gavotte', which he conducted at a concert of the Richmond Philharmonic Association in the City Auditorium on February 25, 1915. Copyright paperwork from the Library of Congress for several of Professor Watson's musical compositions is in family records. One of his compositions, "Penitent's Prayer" has been republished within the last ten years.

Professor Watson took an active part in the development of music courses in Richmond's public school system and taught music at John Marshall High School. Mrs. Watson succeeded her husband as organist for Leigh Street Baptist Church and remained for 34 years until her retirement in 1928. Following her retirement, Leigh Street Church adopted resolutions of appreciation for her contributions, which appeared in *The Richmond News Leader*. Both Professor and Mrs. Watson also taught private music lessons at Beth Elon. They died at Beth Elon in 1933 within days of each other. Laura Watson died on July 2nd and Leslie Watson died on July 6th; both are buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Richmond. Their double marker features an outline of a Gothic arch filled with organ pipes with console below. At the bottom is inscribed this verse from Psalm 150: "Praise him with stringed instruments and organs; let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

Beth Elon has always been occupied by a member of the Watson family. The house and its original approximately 26 acres of land were sold by the family in 1990 to a local real estate developer. Immediately following the sale, Jeanne Etheridge McNeil, the great-granddaughter of Leslie and Laura Watson, arranged to rent Beth Elon until she could negotiate its purchase. Jeanne and Richard McNeil purchased the house and 3.196 acres of the original property in 1999.

Thanks to Laura Watson's gift for correspondence and journal keeping and to Leslie Watson's outstanding talent for photography and record keeping, a rich, detailed history of Beth Elon in words and images still exists. Of special note is a collection of approximately 260 glass negatives, taken between approximately 1888 and 1913. Many of these negatives include images of Beth Elon and the surrounding property.

Beth Elon's simple Queen Anne style is typical of the houses built in Richmond's suburbs during the late 19th century in neighborhoods served by electric trolley lines. While many such examples remain in neighborhoods within the city proper, few remain in the surrounding counties. Beth Elon is a particularly good example of this type of house and is one of only a few remaining in this part of the city's suburbs. The house retains much of its architectural integrity despite alteration. The existence of glass plate negatives and photographs showing the house and surrounding property in earlier days coupled with family letters, journals, ledgers, building plans and other records at Beth Elon makes for a fascinating collection of materials from Henrico County's past.

Beth Elon is recognized with a Henrico County Historic Preservation Program plaque and is listed in the Henrico County Inventory of Historic Architecture. The music, written records, and photography of Leslie and Laura Watson were used as a primary research source for *The Organ in Richmond* written by Donald Traser in 2000. Leslie & Laura Watson will be the subjects of a cultural history exhibit presented by Henrico County at its Meadow Farm Museum in March 2003.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

American Guild of Organists, Virginia/Richmond Chapter - Records
Henrico County Land Records
Watson, Laura Woodruff - Diary (September 23, 1889 - February 23, 1894)
Watson, Laura Woodruff - Letters
Watson, Leslie Woodruff - Photographs of Beth Elon
Watson, Leslie Woodruff - Records
Watson Family Bible
Watson Family Records and Artifacts

Secondary Sources

Etheridge, Frances Watson (granddaughter to Leslie and Laura Watson). Personal reminiscence regarding Beth Elon.

Richmond Times-Dispatch and *Richmond News Leader*. Selected news articles, announcements and obituaries.

Robelen, Laura Ellen Watson (granddaughter of Leslie and Laura Watson). Personal reminiscence regarding Beth Elon.

Traser, Donald R. *The Organ in Richmond: A History of the Organs, Organists, and Organ Music in Richmond, Virginia, from 1816 to 2001*. Richmond, Virginia: The American Book Company, 2001.

Traser, Donald R. *A Richmond Organ Anthology: A selection of organ music by Richmond, Virginia Composers, Past and Present*. Richmond, Virginia, 1995.

Traser, Donald R., Dean and member Richmond Chapter, American Guild of Organists. Telephone and personal interviews

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is identified as Parcel Number 146-A-112 on the tax parcel maps for Henrico County, Virginia.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary includes the house, outbuildings and surrounding property that have historically been part of Beth Elon.

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PHOTO LIST

The following information is the same for all photographs:

Property: Beth Elon
Location: Henrico County, VA
Date:
Negative Number: 20150
Negatives Filed: VA. Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA

View 1 of :

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